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Dominican Crisis:

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Johnson's 48 Hours on a Tightrope

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WASHINGTON.

President Johnson has been a man on a tightrope for 48 hours.

In handling the crisis in the Dominican Republic, he has had to work without a net in the full glare of the press and world opinion, knowing that one misstep could be fatal.

He made the decision to send in 4,500 United States Marines and paratroops not only to save American lives, for there were American lives to save, but to prevent what the Central Intelligence Agency warned him could be another Cuba in the Dominican Republic.

A Communist takeover in the Caribbean nation ruled for 30 years by the late, unlamented dictator, Gen. Rafael L. Trujillo, could endanger American security and at the very least would provide the Republican party with a monumental campaign issue in 1966—and 1968.

The President of the United States had no intention of letting that happen. April is the cruelest month in the Caribbean, and not far in the background was the Johnson administration's memory of April, 1961, and the ill-fated invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs, during President Kennedy's administration.

And so, between 5 p.m. and 6 p.m. Wednesday night, as the situation deteriorated in the Dominican Republic, the President made the decision to send in the Marines.

At the same time, he President and his advisers decided that the United States could ill afford to base its action publicly on foreign or domestic political considerations.

Hence the tightrope. Publicly, Mr. Johnson announced in a two-minute nationally televised address Wednesday night that he was sending in troops "to protect American lives." All day Thursday and yesterday, Administration spokesmen publicly clung to this position.

Privately, however, high officials of the government told both the press and Congress of their deep concern over the possibility that Castro-oriented Communists would gain control in Santo Domingo.

The Administration was fully aware that the decision to send in American armed forces would raise the specter of "Gunboat" and "Big Stick" diplomacy in the Caribbean, a pond where the Marines last landed in 1927, in Nicaragua.

The reaction was not long in coming. Members of the Organization of American States attacked the unilateral U. S. action on Thursday.

Boxed in, however, by the public position of the United States that it was acting solely to save lives, even the Latin critics conceded that the President might have been justified on humanitarian grounds.

The President made his decision at a White House meeting that began 5 p. m. Wednesday, with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Under Secretaries George Ball and Thomas Mann and Defense Secretary Robert McNamara.

At 7:15 p.m. the President and his top national Security Advisers met with Congressional leaders of both parties, including Sen. Everett M. Dirksen [illegible]

posed to be at a $500-a-plate dinner in his honor.

Adm. William F. Raborn, sworn in less than seven hours earlier as the head of the CIA, warned the Congressional nist takeover could be in the leaders that a Castro-Commumaking in the revolt-torn Dominican Republic.

Later that evening high government officials told reporters, in explaining the President's action, that three separate Communist groups, some armed, were participatingin the revolt and that pro-Communist Dominicans trained in Cuba and Czechoslovakia had been slipping back into the Dominican Republic in recent weeks.

These officials explained that until Wednesday afternoon it had appeared that the forces commanded by Brig. Gen. Elias Wessin y Wessin—an anti-Communist of Lebanese descent—were in control of the situation. But matters had taken a turn for the worse, the officials said, and the Wessin y Wessin forces had notified the U. S. they could not guarantee the safety of Americans.

The rebels had begun their fight on Saturday in the name of former President Juan Bosch, idealistic member of the "democratic Left" in Latin America who was criticized for letting Communists grow too powerful in his country, and who was overthrown by Gen. Wessin y Wessin in September, 1963.

On Thursday, as the Administration maintained its public position and professed neutrality in the revolt, further indication of U. S. concern over a Communist victory came in the form of a list of 53 alleged Communists participating [illegible] ranks—a list released in Santo Domingo by the American Embassy headed by career Ambaesador William Tapley Bennett.

At 4 p. m. Thursday Mr. McNamara briefed members of the Senate and House Armed Services Committee behind closed doors. Afterwards, half a dozen Congressmen of both parties issued strong statements warning of the Communist danger in the revolt.

But even yesterday morning, Presidential press secretary George E. Reedy stuck to the official lnie. He insisted, under close questioning by newsmne, that the Marines, by now joined by paratroops, were there to protect lives. "There is no reason to change the statements that have been made," he insisted.

By late afternoon yesterday, still walking the tightrope, President Johnson had word that, through the efforts of the Papal Nuncio in the Dominican Republic, a ceasefire was benig arranged.

At 7:06 p.m., 48 hours after the fateful White House meetings Wednesday night, Mr. Johnson went before the nation on television and became the first Administration official to concede publicly that more was at stake this April in the Caribbean than American lives. He confirmed what officials had told newsmen privately two days ago.

"Meanwhile," he said, "there are signs that people trained outside the Dominican Republic are seeking to gain control."

Unless the OAS acted swiftly, he warned, it might be "too late to preserve the freedom" of the Dominican people.

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